



מכון ויצמן למדע
THE WEIZMANN INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE
REHOVOT · ISRAEL רחובות · ישראל

PROF. I. DOSTROVSKY
President

פרופ' י. דוסטרובסקי
נשיא

17th May, 1974

Prof. Joshua Lederberg
Dept. of Genetics
Stanford University, Medical School
Stanford, Calif. 94305
U.S.A.

Dear Professor Lederberg,

The academic organization of a research institute has to be sufficiently flexible to adjust readily to the changing interests and priorities in science. In keeping with this general philosophy I am continually monitoring the Institute's organization with a view to improving our response to recent advances in science and thus increasing our effectiveness. Groupings of research workers or units which made great sense 20 years ago or more do not necessarily have the same logic today. In this letter I wish to describe to you an example of a recent application of this policy.

In recent years it has become increasingly apparent that membranes play a crucial role in all biological systems. It is now clear that membranes should not be regarded merely as a more or less permeable packaging for cells or tissues, but rather as the seat of the most complex chemical and control processes in biological systems. As a consequence, interest in all aspects of membrane structure and function has grown apace. Responding to this new awareness of the importance of membranes during the last decade, many scientists in the various departments and faculties of the Institute have initiated research projects related to membranes. These initial efforts were due entirely to individual initiative and were therefore not coordinated in any way.

When the total activity in membrane research in the Institute had reached a considerable level, some sort of coordination and exchange of information between the various groups became essential. A short time before his murder at Lod, Professor A. Katzir started a series of informal workshops of all those engaged in membrane research at the Institute. After his death these workshops continued but it became obvious that a more formal structure was desirable. A framework was sought which would bring together at least some of those working on membranes, so that research policy could be discussed and planned jointly and appointments and investment

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in equipment could be planned with reference to the total needs of the group.

After much discussion and study I decided about a year ago to set up a new section which would group together scientists from all parts of the Institute who were working on membranes and who indicated a readiness to join forces. No coercion of any kind was applied, and indeed an appreciable number of scientists elected to stay outside this framework. In fact, it never was envisaged that the new section would represent the totality of our effort in membranes - it would be too stifling.

The new group is headed by Professor Ora Kedem, who has been active in the membrane field for many years. She has been joined by scientists and students from the departments of Polymer Research, Biophysics and Genetics. The section numbers a total of 30 persons, of whom 21 are scientists and students. As from April 1, the membrane research section has its own independent budget and manpower allocation. The new section is within the framework of the Faculty of Biophysics - Biochemistry (Dean: Prof. M. Avron). The group is still physically scattered, but with the general reshuffling of space occupancy which will result from the completion of the Perlman building later this year and the removal of several departments into it, it will become possible to collect together all the components of the membrane research section into one geographical unit.

A process similar to the one I have described above, which led to the establishment of the membrane research section, is now taking place in another field. Interest in neuroscience is increasing in various parts of the Institute and a number of small groups are being formed working on diverse aspects of neuroscience. I am encouraging the work of these new groups and am watching their progress closely. It now seems to me that in the not too distant future it might make sense to combine some of them into a new and independent unit. I shall keep you informed about progress in this new and exciting field in the Institute.

With best regards,

Sincerely,


I. Dostrovsky